

Under Three Flags

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Presidio of San Francisco
Golden Gate
National Recreation Area



Artist's conception of how the Presidio may have appeared in 1779

Over 200 Years of Military History

The Presidio of San Francisco served as an almost continuously active military garrison for more than 200 years under the flags of three nations. Established in 1776 by Spanish soldiers and colonists, the Presidio became part of Mexico when that nation gained its independence in 1821. The first United States troops arrived at the post in 1846, and the Presidio began to develop into the country's most important Army post on the West Coast. Today the Presidio's architectural, historic, natural and scenic landscapes are preserved and protected as a national park for all to enjoy.

Spanish Years: 1776 to 1821

For thousands of years before the Spanish arrived, the native Ohlone people lived on the San Francisco peninsula, where they hunted, fished and gathered plants.

In 1769 a Spanish expeditionary force marched up the coast from Baja California, establishing presidios (military outposts) and missions on the way. During this journey the great inland harbor of San Francisco Bay was first seen by Europeans, and plans were made to fortify and settle the area.

In June 1776 Captain Juan Bautista de Anza led a colonizing party of 240 soldiers and their families north from what is now southern Mexico. Under the command of Anza's lieutenant, Jose Joaquin Moraga, they built an adobe quadrangle and living quarters, and dedicated the Presidio de San Francisco on September 17, 1776. An additional 13-gun battery was completed in 1794 to defend the bay's entrance. These presidial forces represented the northernmost expansion of Spanish rule in America.



Mexican Years: 1821 to 1848

In 1821 the newly independent Republic of Mexico included Alta California as part of its territory. For the next 14 years Mexican soldiers served at the Presidio.

In 1835 the post was temporarily abandoned when General Mariano Vallejo transferred the military headquarters north to Sonoma. Over time, the Presidio's adobe walls slowly dissolved in the winter rains.

American forces landed at the new settlement of Yerba Buena in 1846, during the United States' war with Mexico. (The town was renamed San Francisco the following year.) The ruins of the old Spanish fort were subsequently occupied and repaired by the U.S. Army's New York Volunteers.

The Mexican flag was officially lowered over the Presidio in 1848, when a treaty transferred California to the United States.



American Years: 1848 to 1890

Gold! News of the discovery lured fortune seekers to California in 1848. San Francisco quickly grew in size and importance, prompting the U.S. government to establish a military reservation here. The Army Corps of Engineers built Fort Point, a four-tiered brick and granite fort, to protect the entrance of San Francisco Bay.

The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 emphasized the importance of a rich California and the harbor's military significance to the Union. The war thus stimulated the first major period of construction at the Presidio under U.S. dominion.

The Indian Wars of the 1870s and 1880s spurred further growth for the Presidio. Soldiers stationed here saw action against the Modoc Indians in the Lava Beds of Northern California and against the Apache Indians in the Southwest.

A major tree-planting effort gradually beautified the post and tamed the blowing wind and sand.

With the closure of many frontier outposts in the late 1800s, the Presidio again grew and was transformed into a modern military installation ideally situated for U.S. expansion into the Pacific.





Presidio's Main Post area in 1898 during the Spanish American War.

**American Years:
1890 to 1941**

Modernization of the Presidio in the 1890s included construction numerous of concrete gun batteries on the bluffs. By the 1910s, the Coastal Artillery Corps was stationed nearby at new Fort Winfield Scott, while the cavalry and infantry resided at the main post.

The Presidio cavalry began protecting three new national parks in 1890: Sequoia, General Grant (later Kings Canyon) and Yosemite. They continued these patrols each summer until 1916, when park management was transferred to the newly created National Park Service.

The U.S. went to war with Spain in 1898. Large tent camps spread across the Presidio as troops awaited shipment to the Philippines during this short war and the following Philippine War. Returning sick and wounded were treated in the Army's first permanent general hospital, later named Letterman.



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"Buffalo Soldiers" from the all-black 9th Cavalry served as the nation's first black Presidential Escort of Honor during Theodore Roosevelt's 1903 Presidio visit. They later patrolled Yosemite (pictured).

Earthquake and fire ravaged San Francisco in 1906. An Army effort led by Philippine War figure General Frederick Funston provided law and order as well as food and clothing. Four temporary tent camps housed refugees on the Presidio grounds.

Troops commanded by General John J. Pershing left to pursue Pancho Villa on the Mexican border in 1914. Later, Pershing led the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe during World War I.

The Presidio expanded again in the 1920s when Crissy Army Airfield was built to augment harbor defense. When the Golden Gate Bridge was completed in 1937, the airfield moved to more spacious quarters to the north.

**American Years:
1941 to 1994**

The U.S. entered World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and Presidio soldiers dug foxholes along nearby beaches. General John L. DeWitt conducted the internment of thousands of Japanese and Japanese-American civilians on the West Coast, while Japanese-American soldiers enrolled at a new Military Intelligence School on Crissy Field (pictured). The Presidio served as headquarters for the Western Defense Command and for the Fourth U.S. Army. Letterman became the



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largest Army hospital in the country, treating over 76,000 patients from the Pacific theater in 1945.

After the war, the Presidio was headquarters for both the Sixth Army and the Nike missile defenses around the Golden Gate.

In 1962, the Department of the Interior designated the Presidio a National Historic Landmark, officially recognizing more than 500 buildings of historic value.

**American Years:
1994 to the Present**

When the Golden Gate National Recreation Area was created in 1972, the Presidio was included within its boundaries. The post was transferred to the National Park Service (NPS) on October 1, 1994, after Congress closed the base as part of a military reduction effort. The costly upkeep of the Presidio's historic structures led Congress to create a new federal agency,

the Presidio Trust, to partner with the NPS to care for the park's historic landmarks and its natural and recreational resources.

The Presidio enters the 21st century as a new kind of park, dedicated not only to preserving the past but also to shaping the next era. From a proud past, the Presidio looks to a bright future.

